



File Code: 1950

Date: March 13, 2012

Dear Planning Participant,

The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Power Lake Vegetation Management Project is now available for public review on the World Wide Web at

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/colville/landmanagement/projects>

Copies are also available on compact disc or paper copy from the Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger District office, 315 North Warren, Newport, WA.

The Power Lake Vegetation Management Project is located in the Calispell Creek drainage northwest of Newport, WA, and includes vegetation, water quality, and fish habitat management activities.

The purpose of the comment period for the EA is to provide an opportunity for the public to review and comment on the alternatives prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official (Colville National Forest Supervisor Laura Jo West).

The project was designed through a collaborative process with adjacent landowners, interested members of the public, the Kalispel Tribe, the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, and other agencies. Those who provide substantive comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, part 215.

The 30-day comment period begins with publication of a legal notice in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner* newspaper. **The notice is expected to appear in the March 21, 2012, edition.**

Location

The analysis area encompasses about 22,452 acres of National Forest System (NFS) land within the Calispell Creek watershed. The elevation of the area ranges from about 2,000 feet to about 5,700 feet near Chewelah Peak. This table displays the legal description of the analysis area. A vicinity map for the location of the analysis area is attached to this letter. The area analyzed is approximately 22,452 acres, of which 19,675 acres are National Forest System lands. The other ownership areas are included only for analysis of effects. The project area does not include any wilderness, RARE II, or other inventoried roadless land.

Township	Range	All or portions of Sections
T. 31 N.	R. 43 E.	6
T. 32 N.	R. 41 E.	12, 13
	R. 42 E.	7-29, 32-36
	R. 43 E.	7-8, 17-21, 28-33

Purpose of and Need for Action

Alternatives in the Power Lake EA are based on direction found in the Colville Forest Plan (as amended) and the Pend Oreille County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP, 2005).



Forest vegetation conditions were determined throughout the planning area using field observations, aerial photo interpretation, and stand exams.

Purpose: Meet Forest Plan direction to promote tree growth, reduce insect and disease levels (Forest Plan pages 4-2, 4-18, 4-64, 4-65), and maintain or restore riparian vegetation (INFISH, 1997) and big game habitat. Improve forest conditions by focusing on establishing the composition, structure, pattern, hydrologic function and ecological processes necessary to make terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems sustainable and resilient. (FSM¹ 2020)

Need: Forest vegetation within the Power Lake planning area has an over abundance of trees (overstocked), making them less healthy² and therefore less able to resist uncharacteristically high levels of loss due to insects, disease, and wildfire. Many stands of trees have also been substantially altered from their historic range of variability by the suppression of wildfires over the past 100+ years resulting in increased ladder fuels and growth of tree species that are less tolerant of fire. This has resulted in a higher probability of increased fire size, frequency, intensity, and severity across the landscape. As the probability of higher intensity wildfire increases, there is also increased risk of detrimental effects to key ecosystem components like watershed function and wildlife habitat. The Calispell watershed is an historic use area for the Kalispel Tribe for fishing and other traditional uses. Kalispel Tribal members have requested that the Forest implement vegetation, hydrology and fisheries projects that support cultural traditions and historic use of the Calispell drainage. These projects include restoring more fire tolerant tree species, improving water quality and fish habitat (including removing or replacing culverts that are fish blockages and decommissioning roads located within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas [RHCA's]), and using prescribed fire to improve forage for ungulates.

Alternatives including the Proposed Action

Alternatives were developed by the Interdisciplinary (ID) Team in response to issues identified during scoping. The team identified a reasonable range of alternatives and then evaluated potential environmental impacts (see Chapter III of the EA). The table below compares the alternatives based on criteria for each purpose and need objective. Actions proposed in Alternatives B and C include design requirements that have proven effective in avoiding, minimizing, reducing, eliminating, or rectifying the effects of management activities (40 CFR 1508.22). Maps of the alternatives are located in Appendix A.

Alternative A (No Action)

Existing, previously approved management activities such as some prescribed burning, road maintenance, special use permit administration, cattle grazing, and use of dispersed recreation sites and motorized trails would continue. Due to presence of intermingled ownership within the Power Lake Planning Area, the Forest Supervisor anticipates that management activities would continue on private lands. No restoration of forest health, improvements to riparian habitat terrestrial wildlife habitat conditions, or reduction of hazardous fuels would be implemented. No restoration projects proposed by the Kalispel Tribe would be implemented. No commercial (e.g., timber sales, stewardship contracts) or non-commercial (including mechanical treatments and

¹ FSM = Forest Service Manual

² A healthy forest is defined as the condition in which the forest (trees, stands and forested landscape) meets the desired conditions described in the Forest Plan.

prescribed fire) activities would occur. Existing motorized trails would not be used during project implementation for heavy equipment travel.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

This alternative emphasizes forest health, improvement of riparian habitat and terrestrial wildlife habitat conditions, restoration projects proposed by the Kalispel Tribe, and reduction of hazardous fuels. Both commercial (e.g., timber sales, stewardship contracts) and noncommercial (including mechanical treatments and prescribed fire) activities are proposed. Existing motorized trails would be used during project implementation for heavy equipment travel except on summer holiday weekends. Motorized trails would be restored as recreation trails when they are no longer needed for heavy equipment travel.

Alternative C (Variation of Alternative B)

This alternative is a variation of Alternative B that reduces commercial treatments in a portion of the project area.

Comparison of Purpose and Need Objectives by Alternative

Purpose and Need Objective #	Measurement	A No Action	B	C
1	Acres treated within analysis area to improve forest health (commercial & noncommercial)	0	8,822	5,396
1	Acres treated to reduce crown fire risk based on torching index, crowning index, and crown base height	0	7,778	4,352
1 & 2	Blockages to Fish Passage Removed	0	10	10
1 & 2	Miles of Road Located within RHCAs Decommissioned or Obliterated	0	4.1	4.1
3	% Thermal Cover ³	31	25	30
3	% Hiding Cover	57	53	51
3	% Forage ⁴	12	22	19
4	Estimated number of contracts ⁵ proposed (support local infrastructure)	0	3	2

³ Treatments would occur in areas currently having marginal or nonexistent cover and would improve cover in the long-term.

⁴ See discussion of big-game in Appendix C – Biological Evaluation.

⁵ Includes potential timber sale, stewardship or service contracts.

Response to Request

Comments on the EA must be received in this office by **April 20, 2012**. The comments provided will become a matter of public record and should include: the name, address, and telephone number of the provider as well as the title of the document (Power Lake Vegetation Management Projects Environmental Assessment). In addition, comments should include specific items, along with supporting facts, you believe the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision.

Please send your written comments to the Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger Districts at the address on the front page of this letter. Comments sent via e-mail to ***fs-comments-pacificnorthwest-colville-newport@fs.fed.us*** are also accepted. If you have questions or would like to arrange a meeting please call me at (509) 447-7300.

Sincerely,

/s/ Gayne Sears
GAYNE SEARS
District Ranger

Enclosures (4)

cc: Amy L Dillon
Bill Shields